

An upside-down map of the Arctic region. The landmasses are colored in a light blue, while the surrounding waters are a darker blue. The map is overlaid with a pattern of white stars on a dark blue background, resembling the US flag, and a red background with yellow stars, resembling the Chinese flag. The stars are arranged in a grid-like pattern across the map.

THE PENTAGON'S NEW UPSIDE-DOWN ARCTIC MAP

| OCTOBER 2024 |
BARRY SCOTT ZELLEN, PHD

ABOUT THE REPORT AND AUTHOR

This report is Barry Scott Zellen, PhD's first take on DoD's 2024 Arctic strategy update released in June 2024. He is a Research Scholar in the Department of Geography at the University of Connecticut and a Senior Fellow (Arctic Security) at the Institute of the North. Zellen is the author of *Breaking the Ice: From Land Claims to Tribal Sovereignty in the Arctic* (Lexington Books, 2008); *Arctic Doom, Arctic Boom: The Geopolitics of Climate Change in the Arctic* (Praeger Security and the Environment Series, 2009); *On Thin Ice: The Inuit, the State and the Challenge of Arctic Sovereignty* (Lexington Books, 2009); *The Realist Tradition in International Relations: The Foundations of Western Order* Volumes 1-4 (Praeger Security International, 2011); *State of Doom: Bernard Brodie, the Bomb, and the Birth of the Bipolar World* (Continuum Books, 2011); *The Art of War in an Asymmetric World: Strategy for the Post-Cold War Era* (Continuum Books, 2012); *State of Recovery: The Quest to Restore American Security After 9/11* (Bloomsbury, 2013); and *Arctic Exceptionalism: Cooperation in a Contested World* (Lynne Rienner Books, 2024). Zellen is also editor of *The Fast-Changing Arctic: Rethinking Arctic Security for a Warming World* (University of Calgary Press, Northern Lights Series, 2013); and co-editor of *Culture, Conflict, and Counterinsurgency* (Stanford University Press, Security Studies Series, 2014) and *Land, Indigenous People and Conflict* (Routledge, Complex Real Property Rights Series, 2015).

Cover art by Daniele Devecchi.

THE PENTAGON'S NEW UPSIDE-DOWN ARCTIC MAP

DoD's 2024 Arctic Strategy continues America's pivot away from humanity's collective climate change challenge to containing adversaries real and imagined – risking the unnecessary militarization of the long-tranquil polar region.

By Barry Scott Zellen, PhD

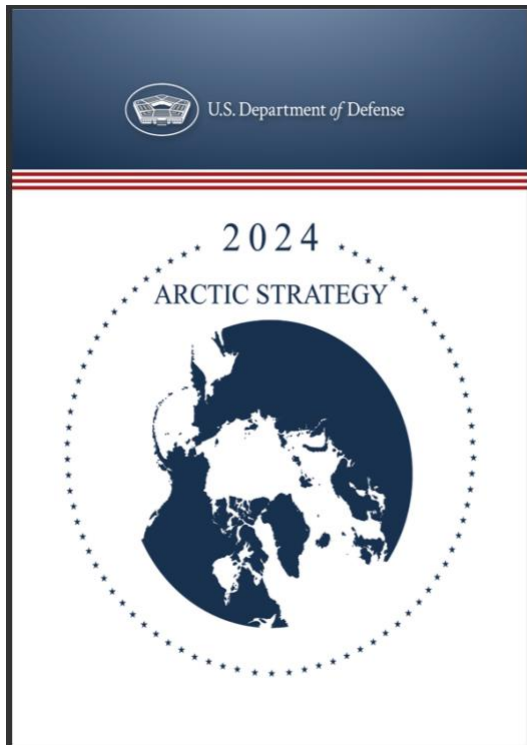
Introduction

With the release of the updated 2024 US Department of Defense Arctic Strategy on June 21, 2024, we see the continuation of America's recalibrated approach to Arctic cooperation – which since 2016 has been increasingly framed through an alliance-centric lens as Arctic international relations become ever more bifurcated. This is particularly true in Europe as Russia's war with Ukraine stumbles into its third year with few signs of abating, and where a reanimated Cold War tension between NATO and Russia continues to intensify. While the DoD's Arctic strategy describes itself as a "new strategic approach" that is driven jointly by "climate change and shifts in the geostrategic environment,"¹ in actuality the Pentagon continues along the trajectory presented two years prior the White House's 2022 National Strategy for the Arctic Region (NSAR), which itself built upon a gathering strategic shift from its post-1991 soft-power approach to its post-2016 Westphalian hard-power restoration that followed Moscow's 2014 hybrid-invasion of eastern Ukraine and lightning annexation of Crimea a decade ago, sounding alarm bells across the western world – thus reflecting, eight years on, more continuity than change.

Russia (Arctic's Largest State) and (non-Arctic) China Partnership Perceived by Pentagon as a New Axis of Disruption

In a new twist – one gathering stream ever since Beijing unveiled its own Arctic strategy in 2018 – side-by-side with America's decade-long articulated concerns regarding Russia's resurgence, we see in DoD's new Arctic strategy heightened concerns with Beijing's Arctic ambitions, capabilities and presence, which are now

¹ United States Department of Defense, *2024 Arctic Strategy*, June 21, 2024, 1.



elevated to the top of the Pentagon’s new strategic map of the Arctic. This is, in many ways, counterintuitive, since China is not, has never been, and in most likely future scenarios will never be an Arctic state. As articulated in the 2024 strategy’s executive summary, this rising concerns reflect China’s rise as a world power more generally, more so than its Arctic policy: “Implementing this strategy will enable DoD to achieve our desired end state for the region, aligning with efforts to strengthen homeland defense, safeguard U.S. interests, and improve interoperability with Arctic Allies and partners while preserving focus on the pacing challenge of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) globally.”²

Non-Arctic China’s heightened position within American Arctic policy places it ahead of other, more traditional (and to many Arctic residents, more pressing) pillars of U.S. Arctic policy, such as addressing and mitigating the risks of climate change which topped America’s priorities in its 2013 NSAR – discussed by Mihaela David at The Arctic Institute³ – while continuing to foster collaborative partnerships with friends and allies in the Arctic as it has, with particular enthusiasm after the White House’s 2009’s Arctic strategy update, albeit through an alliance-centric lens rather than its earlier lens of circumpolar unity across the old East-West divide.

DoD’s 2024 Arctic Strategy

The 2024 DoD strategy aims to “strengthen the ability of the United States to build integrated deterrence and effectively manage risk to U.S. interests in the Arctic region by enhancing our domain awareness and Arctic capabilities; engaging with Allies, partners, and key stakeholders; and exercising tailored presence.”⁴ As with earlier iterations of America’s Arctic policy and strategy, this diverse array of stakeholders includes “partner nations; U.S. Federal, state, local, tribal, and territorial agencies and governments; industry; inter-governmental organizations; and non-governmental organizations,” all of which are discussed further below.⁵

² 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 1.

³ Mihaela David, “U.S. National Strategy for the Arctic Region: Strong Foothold or on Thin Ice?” *The Arctic Institute*, May 13, 2013, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/us-national-strategy-for-arctic-region/>.

⁴ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 1.

⁵ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 1.

Navigating a ‘New, More Dynamic Arctic Security Environment’

While circumpolar unity and collaboration had defined American Arctic policy after the Cold War ended, Russia’s military resurgence and its increasingly kinetic military interventions in former Soviet territories have catalyzed a growing wariness of Russia in the Arctic, evident in the many updates to U.S. Arctic policy since 2016 noting with increasing alarm Russia’s resurgence. But despite this increasing hard-power tilt in policy, the bones of American Arctic policy retain a collaborative spirit, but this spirit is increasingly truncated as the universal circumpolar cooperation fostered since 1991 – when it took its initial form in the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS), and again in 1996 when the AEPS evolved into the Arctic Council – fractures under the new stresses of resumed East-West tension, yielding the emergence of competing blocs subdividing the Arctic reminiscent of the Cold War.

Accordingly, in its newly unveiled 2024 strategy update, DoD articulates its Arctic priorities through an increasingly alliance-centric lens:

“Vital for homeland defense, the North American Arctic region hosts aerospace warning, aerospace control, and maritime warning capabilities for the binational U.S.-Canada North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). The North American Arctic region is also integral to the execution of Indo-Pacific operations, as the northern flank for projecting military force from the U.S. homeland to that region. ... The Arctic serves as an avenue for power projection to Europe and is vital to the defense of Atlantic sea lines of communication between North America and Europe. The Arctic includes multiple strategically significant maritime chokepoints. Reduction in sea ice due to climate change means chokepoints such as the Bering Strait between Alaska and Russia and the Barents Sea north of Norway, are becoming more navigable and more economically and militarily significant.”⁶

And, as DoD further describes:

“PRC and Russian activities in the Arctic – including their growing cooperation – the enlargement of NATO, and the increasing effects of climate change herald a new, more dynamic Arctic security environment. These changes, as well as the growing cooperation between Russia and the PRC, have the potential to alter the Arctic’s

⁶ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 2.

stability and threat picture. They also present opportunities for DoD to enhance security in the region by deepening cooperation with Allies and partners.”⁷

Beijing’s Arctic interests and its growing collaboration with Moscow, fueled by the West’s isolation of Russia since its 2022 Ukraine invasion in conjunction with Washington’s continuing efforts to contain China’s global rise, features prominently in DoD’s current perceptions of the Arctic strategic environment, so much so that “PRC Activities in the Arctic” comes first among the five key features of the Arctic’s strategic environment described by DoD in its 2024 strategy update. The rapid economic decoupling of the West from Russia has forced Moscow to pivot from the West toward Eurasia, where it has found new markets for its vast energy resources – not just China but also Singapore and India, which take a more balanced approach to the new geostrategic, East-West division of world politics.

Where it was Russia that had, since 2014, topped America’s list of strategic concerns in the Arctic, China now stands atop the latest list of DoD’s latest priorities for the polar region – a noteworthy but in many ways illogical strategic re-prioritization of what may be considered to be the least salient among the five elements of the Arctic security environment discussed in the strategy. DoD’s new map of the Arctic’s strategic landscape features five salient components that define its priorities in the Arctic. First, as noted above, is “1. PRC Activities in the Arctic,” followed by “2. Russian Activities in the Arctic;” and “3. PRC-Russia Collaboration;” with “4. Changing Security Architecture” and “5. The Effects of Climate Change on the Operating Environment.”

The first three together reflect Pentagon’s strategic obsession with what it perceives as an increasingly menacing “Russia-China axis.” This axis is reminiscent of the Pentagon’s earlier “Axis of Evil” that strategically bungled the Global War on Terror (GWOT) by mixing together all manner of disconnected adversaries that had little to do with one another than sharing a mutual enmity – from the global jihadist movement of Al Qaeda to the secular tyranny of the Baathist Party in Iraq, whose failure of strategic understanding yielded the catastrophe of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the world’s first jihadist terror state, carved out of the transnational Sunni heartland of the Iraq-Syria frontier as secular Baathist tyrannies in both states came under fire from both America (with its coalition partners) and Al Qaeda.

The Pentagon’s new Arctic map shares with its earlier muddled GWOT map a strategic myopia that contains within the very same seeds of disaster we saw

⁷ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 3.

during the forever wars the GWOT yielded – and which now again threatens to bring similar chaos and conflict to a region that has been, until now, exemplary for its peaceful coexistence, and multilateral collaboration.

China in the Arctic: Seeking Greater ‘Influence and Access’

China’s ascension to the top spot is counterintuitive, as China is not an Arctic state and had not released an Arctic strategy until 2018, while Russia is and has been the largest Arctic state with the most Arctic territory, the largest Arctic economy and the most diverse and populous Arctic demography. The changing security architecture, principally defined by the NATO expansion to now include formerly neutral Finland and Sweden, is near the bottom with climate change impacts, once the top concern (as described in the 2013 National Strategy for the Arctic Region (NSAR) of the Obama White House) coming dead last – all the more curious since the present Biden Administration is in many ways the successor to the Obama legacy, but as climate change activists have discovered, with profound policy disagreements with their predecessor. In this first part, we will discuss China’s curious placement at the top of DoD’s priority list.

DoD’s 2024 Arctic strategy, in addition to placing China first in its mapping of the five most salient features of the Arctic security environment, describes China’s Arctic activities as follows: “The PRC includes the Arctic in its long-term planning and seeks to increase its influence and activities in the region. Though not an Arctic nation, the PRC is attempting to leverage changing dynamics in the Arctic to pursue greater influence and access, take advantage of Arctic resources, and play a larger role in regional governance.”⁸ Not mentioned here, but no less relevant, is that China’s Arctic policy more closely resembles, in both form and substance, that of its non-Arctic neighbors, particularly Japan, as do its Arctic capabilities which more closely resemble Japan’s than either Russia, with whom it is equated, or the United States.

Moreover, also left out of this re-prioritization is the importance of strategic context: China has risen fast and high as a global power, seeking “to pursue greater influence and access”⁹ all around the world, as all great powers do. China is not alone in asserting its Arctic interests and ambitions. Japan, Korea, Singapore and India are also increasingly active non-Arctic states with expanding Arctic interests and ambitions, and these – collectively – need not be perceived as threats to the Arctic or to the West, as they may be to the benefit of Arctic peoples, many of

⁸ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 3.

⁹ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 3.

whom continue to live in poverty and face persistent gaps in health, nutrition and economic security with their fellow countrymen to the south, and who welcome increasing external interest in developing their long-neglected homelands if done respectfully, in partnership with Indigenous peoples, and within existing governance structures that both ensure Indigenous participation and respect for traditional values.

DoD further describes China's Arctic presence, noting: "The PRC seeks to bolster its operational expertise in the Arctic, where its presence, while limited, is increasing. The PRC operates three icebreakers – the Xue Long, Xue Long 2, and Zhong Shan Da Xue Ji Di—which enable the PRC's dual civil-military research efforts in the Arctic. Over the course of the PRC's 13 Arctic research expeditions to date, the vessels have tested unmanned underwater vehicles and polar-capable fixed-wing aircraft, among other activities. People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) vessels have also demonstrated the capability and intent to operate in and around the Arctic region through exercises alongside the Russian Navy over the past several years."¹⁰ DoD elaborates its concern with China's Arctic interest and presence: "Although the vast majority of the Arctic is under the jurisdiction of sovereign states, the PRC seeks to promote the Arctic region as a 'global commons' in order to shift Arctic governance in its favor. The PRC's 2018 Arctic Policy claims non-Arctic states should contribute to the region's 'shared future for mankind' due to the Arctic's global significance. Its 'Polar Silk Road' has been used to gain a footing in the Arctic by pursuing investments in infrastructure and natural resources, including in the territory of NATO Allies."¹¹

But China's increasing Arctic presence mirrors that of dozens of other non-Arctic states which, like China, hold observer status at the Arctic Council, with an Arctic presence dating back a century to the Spitzbergen Treaty of 1920, which internationalized access to Svalbard's economy, part of a global commons in the polar world that many nations, not just China, embrace. It should be noted that former two-term Alaska governor Wally Hickel – who served as Interior Secretary in President Nixon's cabinet and famously saw not only the Alaska Pipeline be built on his watch but also welcomed the historic passage of the first comprehensive Arctic land claims accord with Indigenous peoples of the Arctic, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971 – promoted Alaska and the Arctic as not only part of the global commons, but the solution to what ecologist Garrett Hardin called the "tragedy of the commons." Indeed, rather than dismissing China's legitimate Arctic interests, China could instead be welcomed as an economic partner to help the Arctic commons achieve its full potential, commensurate with

¹⁰ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 3.

¹¹ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 3.

China's increased global stature and upon whose economy so many western nations depend – and not as a spoiler intent on disrupting the Arctic status quo or tilting regional governance in its favor.

Just as it is illogical to find non-Arctic China topmost on DoD's list of salient features of the Arctic strategic environment, it is equally illogical to find Russia – by far the largest, most populous, most economically developed, and most culturally diverse Arctic state – coming second after China. With a string of American military defeats to weaker adversaries from Vietnam to Afghanistan behind it, and a festering proxy war in Ukraine with Russia that has failed keep Ukraine whole and yet risks escalation to general war, it is disconcerting to see DoD's Arctic priorities so inverted and decoupled from strategic and geographic reality.

Russia in the Arctic: 'Largest Arctic Territory' with 'Most Developed Regional Military Presence'

In section “2. Russian Activities in the Arctic,” DoD notes that the “Arctic plays a significant role in Russia's security and economic calculations. This importance is reflected in Russian strategic documents, including Russia's 2023 Foreign Policy Concept, which raises the Arctic to Russia's second priority region after Russia's 'near abroad,'” and which – though left unstated – is strategically interconnected with Russia's Eurasian pivot, also described in its 2023 foreign policy concept update.¹²

As DoD observes, “Russia boasts the largest Arctic territory and the most developed regional military presence of all the Arctic nations. Of concern, Russia's Arctic capabilities have the potential to hold the U.S. homeland, as well as Allied and partner territory, at risk,” though such a concern dates back the Cold War when Russia was part of a much larger state and empire, and whose ideological opposition as the principal strategic adversary to the West rallied much of the world (and in particular, the formerly colonial world once occupied and subjugated by the West), behind Moscow's banner as the world's revolutionary vanguard, once a role played by a much younger and more idealistic United States.¹³ DoD further observes the “Kola Peninsula is home to Russia's Northern Fleet and important strategic nuclear forces, specifically its submarine-launched ballistic missile force,” and that “Russia continues to invest heavily in new military infrastructure and refurbishing Soviet-era installations in the Arctic” – though it

¹² 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 4.

¹³ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 4.

omits mention of the context that makes the Arctic so important to Russia: that Russia's remote, northern geography excludes European access to an all-year, warm water seaport, elevating the strategic importance of its colder and more remote Arctic coast.¹⁴ Russia is active militarily in the Arctic not because of any external ambitions of conquest or external interference, but because it has no other choice – particularly in light of the polar thaw and the rapid decline in isolation long afforded by its once frozen and largely inaccessible Arctic.

Noting the current strategic situation in Ukraine, DoD notes, “Despite some attrition of Russia’s conventional land forces due to losses in Ukraine, its strategic, air, and maritime forces remain intact. Further, Russia has demonstrated the ability to reconstitute and reorganize its conventional ground forces, which illuminates the potential for future improved readiness and combat expertise in the Arctic.”¹⁵ But it should be noted that the protracted war in Ukraine also offers some encouraging lessons on Russian strategic overreach and its inability to project power beyond – and in the case of the current Ukrainian occupation near Kursk, within – Russia’s borders. One could argue that the lessons of Ukraine, missed by the West in its zeal to expand NATO, isolate Russia and sever economic ties to Russia is that Russia’s insecurity, and not its strength, is a salient driver of Moscow’s present military quagmire.

DoD rebukes Russia for being a trouble maker in the Arctic, pointing out that, “In addition to nuclear, conventional, and special operations threats, Russia seeks to carry out lower-level destabilizing activities in the Arctic against the United States and our Allies, including through Global Positioning System jamming and military flights that are conducted in an unprofessional manner inconsistent with international law and custom.”¹⁶ This seems to be more a tactical cherry-picking of incidents of concern to the United States rather than a proper strategic challenge, given Russia’s own need for stability in the Arctic (long its professed goal). And, ignoring America’s own strategic advantages in sea and air power that limited Russia’s capacity for interference during the Cold War’s many hot regional wars against Moscow’s allies in Asia, DoD argues that “Russia also has a clear avenue of approach to the U.S. homeland through the Arctic and could use its Arctic-based capabilities to threaten the ability of the United States to project power both to Europe and the Indo-Pacific region, constraining our ability to respond to crises.”¹⁷ However, this did not happen – even during Soviet times when Russia was far more powerful and militarily self-reliant relative to the United States than it is now, with its dependence upon primitive barrel bombs in the wars

¹⁴ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 4.

¹⁵ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 4.

¹⁶ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 4.

¹⁷ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 4.

in Syria and Ukraine, slow-moving and easily intercepted drones from Iran, inaccurate artillery shells from North Korea, and ill-trained and under-motivated conscripts – suitable at best for a limited, asymmetrical war with a smaller power, but relatively useless in dissuading the American military from projecting power anywhere in the world.

DoD also takes issue with Russia's claims that the Northern Sea Route (NSR) through the Northeast Passage are internal waterways, a position that mirrors Canada's views of the Northwest Passage (NWP) through its Arctic Archipelago: "Russia's maritime infrastructure could allow it to enforce excessive and illegal maritime claims along the Northern Sea Route (NSR) between the Bering Strait and Kara Strait. Russia claims the right to regulate Arctic waters along the NSR in excess of the authority permitted under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), placing excessive requirements on foreign vessels transiting the route and threatening force against vessels out of compliance with Russian regulations."¹⁸ But Russia's claims for the NSR parallel close U.S. ally Canada's own for the NWP, and while the United States has since 1988 agreed to disagree in a friendly manner with Ottawa on these issues, it shows far fewer diplomatic niceties in its response to Russia's interpretation of UNCLOS Article 234 on ice-covered areas, a legitimate point of disagreement in the always nebulous world of international law. Indeed, both Russia and Canada root their interpretations in a pre-climate change world when the Arctic was, for the most part, ice-covered much of the year, but which now, as the polar thaw accelerates, is perhaps less salient. Canada, for its part, while sharing with Russia its perspective on UNCLOS Article 234, has in contrast to Russia sought to inhibit use of the NWP, which it is unable to properly defend on its own, while Russia has in turn fostered expanded global use of the NSR even while asserting its status as internal waters, a position more in line with American interests.

Russia-PRC Collaboration: 'Growing Alignment in the Region Is of Concern'

Section 3 weaves sections 1 and 2 together, looking at the strengthening partnership between China and Russia. A partnership driven, at least in part, by the West's aggressive isolation of Russia: "Increasingly, the PRC and Russia are collaborating in the Arctic across multiple instruments of national power. While significant areas of disagreement between the PRC and Russia remain, their

¹⁸ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 4.

growing alignment in the region is of concern, and DoD continues to monitor this cooperation.”¹⁹

This alignment between Russia and China has been greatly accelerated by the West’s isolation of Russia, forcing Moscow to refocus on Eurasia as it finds itself decoupled from the West in Europe despite its long integration of its energy exporting economy with Europe’s energy-importing economies. China as Russia’s largest neighbor is a natural trading and strategic partner, in spite of their long history of strategic competition and occasional border clashes. As DoD acknowledged, there are still many disagreements between them, just as the United States and Canada have much to disagree upon even as their fates remain closely intertwined – and a closer alignment between China and Russia should be of no more concern to the United States than the U.S.–Canada alignment is to Russia.

Worrying less about Russia’s newly re-embraced alignment with China, and more how to nudge these two neighbors apart with strengthened bilateral relations with the West, would be more helpful to American interests, and this includes courting China as a partner in Arctic development, and Russia as an Arctic neighbor with a shared history of collaboration – rather than pushing the two closer together while lamenting the challenges of confronting an alignment that strengthened largely in reaction to the West’s vigorous isolation of Russia. DoD acknowledges this causality, noting: “Russia’s isolation as a result of its full-scale invasion of Ukraine has made it increasingly reliant on the PRC for financing energy export infrastructure in the Arctic. Over 80 percent of Russia’s natural gas production and nearly 20 percent of its petroleum production comes from the Arctic, and Russia is increasingly turning to the PRC to fund this extraction and purchase these resources. PRC-Russia military cooperation, including joint exercises in the Arctic, continues to increase. In 2022 and 2023, PLAN and Russian Navy ships operated together in international waters off the coast of Alaska, and the Chinese Coast Guard and Russian Federal Security Service signed a memorandum of understanding on maritime law enforcement. These activities could open the door for further PRC presence in the Arctic and along the NSR.”²⁰

Amidst the West’s isolation of Russia, which includes the active participation of Japan, Russia has little choice but to turn east, as it did in its Eurasian pivot; after all, it was the West that closed its doors to Russia, hoping to bankrupt its economy – but instead, it initiated a global re-bifurcation of the world in which numerous Asian states, many friendly to the West as well as to the East, stepped up to

¹⁹ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 4.

²⁰ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 4-5.

embrace the new opportunity that presented itself. Indeed, Japan was once a major investor in the NSR, with Hokkaido hoping to become a principal gateway to the Russian Arctic, much the way Iceland has positioned itself as a valued waystation between the Americas and Europe. But since Russia's post-invasion isolation, with Japan now out of the picture, China is all that's left. This was the West's opportunity lost, more than a nefarious alignment of hostile powers against the West.

Indeed, one could counter DoD's muddled new map of the Arctic with a long list of non-Arctic states which have Arctic policies and strategies comparable in form and substance to China's, with a polar presence on par with China, and Arctic interests and capabilities of comparable scale – countries like Japan, noted above, but which also include South Korea, Singapore and India, as well as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Australia. China may be the world's most populous nation with the most dynamic and resource-hungry economy, but it is not alone in the community of nations with Arctic interests – and as with these other states, its interests do not inherently place Beijing on a collision course with the West. Until 2022, many of these same states were equally engaged with Russia, and partners in its post-Cold War global economic integration that helped bring peace to much of the world. Though their reactions to Moscow's strategic blunder in Ukraine diverge, with NATO members and military partners of the United States aligned in their opposition to Moscow's military adventure, much of the world has stepped up to fill the vacuum left with their exit from Russia's economic constellation, including many friends of both East and West. China is not so different, it's only much bigger and undeniably important to global stability. To project onto our complex and divided world an axis of alignment uniting Beijing and Moscow in an anti-western crusade ignores over a quarter century of post-Cold War calm, and risks missing an opportunity to build bridges to both great powers, in the Arctic and beyond.

Adapting to a Changing Arctic: Climate and Security

As we near the bottom rungs of DoD's priority ladder in the Arctic's strategic environment, we come next to section "4. Changing Security Architecture," on NATO and its recent expansion – an issue one might expect to top the Pentagon's Arctic map, and which dominated most policy and media attention after Moscow's ill-fated (thus far) full-scale invasion of Ukraine began.

The Changing Arctic, I: Evolving Security Architecture

But instead, in the Pentagon's 2024 Arctic strategy, NATO gets a mere 106 words and a fourth-place finish (not even earning a bronze medal, which was instead awarded to the China-Russia alignment); these 106 words suggest an underappreciated significance of what until recently was perceived as an issue of major importance, raising many questions about the Pentagon's current priorities.

Despite DoD's assertion of the importance of the NATO expansion to the Arctic's strategic environment, this paucity of words and relatively low placement among the five most salient features of the Arctic's strategic environment, conveys the polar opposite: "Finland and Sweden made the decision to join the NATO Alliance in the wake of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Seven of eight Arctic nations (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and the United States) are now NATO Allies, thereby strengthening the Western security architecture in the region."²¹ But architecture in the absence of strategic wisdom and without an accurate strategic map can, despite the best of intentions and the greatest of investments, become a fragile house of cards. Indeed, this rapid increase in the number of Arctic states now in NATO, and current decrease in its prioritization amidst the Pentagon's illogical pivot to address a non-existent China threat to the freedom and security of the Arctic, presents us with a contradiction. Can we safely assume the alliance expansion has strengthened the security of the Arctic, so much so that DoD can quickly pivot its strategic attention to Eurasia, in lockstep with both China's continuing rise and Russia's 2023 foreign policy concept revision?

The dramatic expansion in border territory with Russia that NATO is now pledged to defend may, paradoxically, increase and not decrease the insecurity of the Arctic, with its adjacency to Russia's strategic military bases in and around Murmansk and rugged, lightly-populated and remote geography – potentially strengthening Russia's hand by increasing the cost to the West of redressing even the smallest of provocations by Russia (of the sort that the Ukraine conflict began with in 2014). The accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO may thus increase the risk of escalation, and ironically motivate a determined Russia to expand present and/or future conflicts horizontally. If invading Finland means continental war with Russia, Moscow may ironically be incentivized to pre-emptively strike deeper into NATO territory, moving the center of gravity farther from its own borders to those with less at stake, who may in turn be more inclined to seek a rapid peace – fracturing NATO's unity and undermining its commitment to collective defense. The fate of the long-neutral Nordic states of Sweden and Finland, which enjoyed the regional diplomatic prominence of being buffer states that long stabilized the Nordic region, are now inflexibly tied to the West explicitly

²¹ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 5.

via NATO's commitment to collective security – an inflexibility that its prior neutrality policies did not share. The end result is thus a more brittle, and therefore less resilient, security architecture where a World War I-styled escalation to general war becomes more likely, not less – even if a World War II-styled failure of deterrence has become less so.

Touting the gains of the alliance expansion, DoD's 2024 Arctic strategy notes the "Arctic NATO Allies possess highly capable militaries, and NATO's enlargement, in addition to increasing Nordic defense cooperation, will create new opportunities for combined planning, information sharing, and exercises that will expand regional collaboration," even though it was this very same NATO with its widely touted "combined planning, information sharing, and exercises" that was, in the end, outflanked at the negotiating table by the antidemocratic, anti-Western, but greatly outgunned Taliban – who never forgot the classic Clausewitzian dictum that "war is a continuation of policy by other means," something woefully absent in the new DoD Arctic strategy.

However, the strategy does prudently recognize that: "At the same time, an extended Alliance border with Russia in the Arctic increases the need for DoD to manage risk in the region."²² Though succinctly stated, as discussed above, these risks can be great. Just as the tiny Baltic statelets of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, in their earlier joining of NATO, introduced three new, brittle tripwires to the expanded European security architecture, NATO's more recent and expansive Nordic expansion has now introduced a new, vast tripwire stretching from the Arctic to the Baltic - across which any Russian incursion, real or imagined, could escalate quickly to continental war. The benefits of buffer zones to history have clearly been forgotten in the zeal to contain Russia – and the Arctic has been, if anything, the world's greatest and largest of buffer zones, helping to keep the Soviet Union and the United States feeling secure throughout the Cold War. Too aggressive a containment strategy can create new and explosive pressures (reminiscent of the interwar years in Europe), as Russia feels itself boxed into a crowded continent. At the very least, more than 106 words would be helpful on this important but under-discussed fourth point on NATO's historic expansion and its ramifications for Arctic security.

The Changing Arctic, II: Mitigating Climate Change Impacts

And at last, we come to the final section, "5. The Effects of Climate Change on the Operating Environment," which one might expect in any Arctic strategy to top the list describing the Arctic's changing strategic environment. As noted above, the

²² 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 5.

issue of climate change topped the Obama White House's 2013 NSAR, and framed America's strategic understanding of the Arctic and its importance to global security since at least the 2009 Arctic policy update in the final days of the George W. Bush administration, and in earlier U.S. Arctic policies, concerns with the protection of the Arctic environment and its ecosystems, were paramount. But here, in the Pentagon's new Arctic map, we find the pressing challenges of climate change following in turn DoD's strategic prioritization of China, Russia, the Russia-China alignment, and NATO's expansion, as the fifth and final priority area mapped.

As DoD's strategy describes:

"Climate change is rapidly reshaping the Arctic, which is warming more than three times faster than the rest of the world. The changes in the environment not only impact Arctic communities' way of life, but also DoD's operating context. DoD, State, and local infrastructure, much of it built during the Cold War era, faces degradation due to permafrost thaw and faster-than-anticipated rates of coastal erosion. More frequent forest fires in Alaska impact training days, and increased variability of weather can affect warfighter and equipment performance. Sustaining distributed forces and remote operating locations is even more challenging in these changing Arctic conditions."²³

While recognizing the dramatic impacts of climate change on both Arctic peoples and their communities as well as on DoD operations, the strategy omits to mention the interconnection of these respective impacts.

As seen with the cataclysmic wildfires in Canada's Northwest Territories in 2023, which led to a months-long displacement of over half the territory's population by military-assisted mass evacuations (including the entire population of Yellowknife, the capital city of the NWT, which was at risk of being overrun by an Apocalyptic wall of flame), it is likely that in the future, as climate change continues to profoundly impact the Arctic, that the U.S. military's Arctic mission will increasingly be shaped by efforts to respond to climate crises and threats of this scale – which more than any threat posed by China or Russia, real or imagined, puts the entire region at great risk and which should unite all Arctic states as they jointly confront this collective challenge faced by humanity, as understood so well by the 2013 NSAR but which has since declined in priority as a more Westphalian conception of Arctic security sets in, one in need of a bad guy. Or, as we see in the 2024 DoD

²³ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 5-6.

Arctic strategy, two bad guys – both of which have as much at risk from climate change as the West.

While subordinated to the above-discussed challenges, the 2024 strategy does acknowledge that these challenges do indeed confront the Arctic: “The Arctic may experience its first practically ice-free summer by 2030, and the loss of sea ice will increase the viability of Arctic maritime transit routes and access to undersea resources. Increases in human activity will elevate the risk of accidents, miscalculation, and environmental degradation.”²⁴ As these changes take place, DoD acknowledges the U.S. Joint Force must be ready and equipped to mitigate the risks associated with potential contingencies in the Arctic,” and “must also take into account that the Arctic’s North American and European sub-regions have vastly different operating environments. The former is dryer, colder, and sparsely populated with minimal infrastructure, whereas the latter, influenced by the Gulf Stream, is comparatively warmer, wetter, and more populous, with more robust roads, ports, and communications networks.”²⁵ This is a helpful and objective reflection of the reality of the Arctic: it is diverse, and its geography, demography and climate vary greatly – and with this variance comes an increased complexity and diversity of future threats to the region.

Indeed, there is an active maritime Arctic where naval power remains salient, even without the advent of climate change; and, there are deeply isolated interior regions of the terrestrial Arctic of both mainland North America and Russia, where even land power is hard to project, and where wildfires may present the most salient threat. There is also the more frozen and insular High Arctic in Canada’s Arctic Archipelago and on the islands north of Russia’s mainland, where melting ice has been fast-changing the region’s geopolitics, as it shifts from isolation to interconnectedness with the world ocean. There are, in short, many different regional variations in the Arctic’s climate and geography that will each, in its own way, transform under the pressures of climate change – and which will command the attention of our military planners.

With this prioritization of the above-discussed topography of the Arctic’s strategic environment, DoD seeks an “end state” that “in cooperation with our Allies and partners, seeks to preserve the Arctic as a stable region in which the U.S. homeland remains secure and vital national interests are safeguarded;” and the “ways” through which it will achieve this sought stability is “through a monitor-and-respond approach” that “involves robust intelligence collection in concert with other departments, agencies, Allies, and partners to provide early indications and

²⁴ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 6.

²⁵ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 6.

warning to manage risk. This includes monitoring the activities of our adversaries as well as the physical changes to the operating environment.”²⁶ And, “Should the security environment shift in a way that necessitates a DoD response,” the Pentagon stands ready to “deploy the Joint Force globally at the time and place of our choosing. This includes responding in the Arctic, both independently and in cooperation with Allies and partners.”²⁷

This reinforces America’s long embrace of Arctic collaboration in its approach to securing the Arctic. While once Russia was considered a partner in American Arctic policy and strategy, since 2016 – and particularly after Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine – this was no longer the case, with Russia considered for a time the top Arctic security threat facing NATO, but now seemingly displaced by non-Arctic China. To strengthen its capacity to respond, as needed, to future security threats in the Arctic, DoD plans to “1. Enhance the Joint Force’s Arctic capabilities,” “2. Engage with our Allies and partners; Federal, State, and local authorities; Alaska Native tribes and communities; and industry in order to strengthen integrated deterrence and increase our shared security,” and “3. Exercise presence in the Arctic by training both independently and alongside Allies and partners to demonstrate interoperability and credible joint capabilities while supporting homeland defense and global power projection operations.”

The Pentagon concludes its Arctic strategy update by affirming that, “As the Arctic security environment evolves, DoD must remain prepared to protect our national interests,” and the “calibrated approach laid out in this strategy will guide how DoD adapts to geopolitical and geophysical changes in the Arctic and ensure U.S. Allies and partners act cohesively in this increasingly accessible region. With the appropriate resources, this strategy will enable DoD to support whole-of-government efforts to maintain security and stability in the Arctic and beyond.”²⁸

Recalibrating Arctic Cooperation and the Three Es

In DoD’s updated 2024 Arctic Strategy, we see the continued recalibration of America’s approach to Arctic cooperation, increasingly reframed through an alliance-centric lens as world politics becomes ever more bifurcated. DoD therefore seeks to foster the emergence of an “End State” that “in cooperation with our Allies and partners, seeks to preserve the Arctic as a stable region in which the

²⁶ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 6.

²⁷ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 6.

²⁸ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 18

U.S. homeland remains secure and vital national interests are safeguarded.²⁹ The “Ways” through which it achieves such sought stability will be “through a monitor-and-respond approach” that “involves robust intelligence collection in concert with other departments, agencies, Allies, and partners to provide early indications and warning to manage risk. This includes monitoring the activities of our adversaries as well as the physical changes to the operating environment.”³⁰

To strengthen its capacity to respond as needed to future security threats to the Arctic, DoD will pursue what I call the “3Es” of Enhance, Engage and Exercise, all compatible with DoD’s aspiration to nurture closer and more sustained cooperation with its Arctic allies and partners. More specifically, the 3Es are: “1. Enhance the Joint Force’s Arctic capabilities,” “2. Engage with our Allies and partners; Federal, State, and local authorities; Alaska Native tribes and communities; and industry in order to strengthen integrated deterrence and increase our shared security,” and “3. Exercise presence in the Arctic by training both independently and alongside Allies and partners to demonstrate interoperability and credible joint capabilities while supporting homeland defense and global power projection operations.”³¹

DoD’s ultimate goal, as it later articulates in its conclusion, is thus:

“As the Arctic security environment evolves, DoD must remain prepared to protect our national interests. The calibrated approach laid out in this strategy will guide how DoD adapts to geopolitical and geophysical changes in the Arctic and ensure U.S. Allies and partners act cohesively in this increasingly accessible region. With the appropriate resources, this strategy will enable DoD to support whole-of-government efforts to maintain security and stability in the Arctic and beyond.”³²

Enhancing DoD’s Arctic Capabilities

DoD’s first of the 3Es is “Enhancing our Arctic capabilities, particularly domain awareness and communications, will enable DoD to better monitor and respond to threats from and through the Arctic, and thus better deter aggression and defend the U.S. homeland.” These capabilities include “pursue early warning capabilities; discrimination sensors; tracking sensors; Command, Control, Communications,

²⁹ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 6.

³⁰ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 6.

³¹ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 6.

³² 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 18.

Computers, Cyber, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (C5ISR) capabilities; improved understanding of the electromagnetic spectrum; and sensing and forecasting capabilities.”³³ Looking north to the periphery of Arctic North America, where lightly populated (and NORAD partner) Canada is sovereign over the vast majority of the region’s Arctic territory (much of it offshore archipelago that is even more lightly settled and less vigorously defended than the Canadian mainland, and simultaneously across the Atlantic to the NATO members of the European Arctic in Fennoscandia as well as in the High North Atlantic islands, DoD will both “prioritize efforts in the North American Arctic in cooperation with Canada, while also enhancing capabilities with Allies and partners in the European Arctic.”³⁴ And with an eye on future budget allocations and its growing need for hardware to fulfill and expanding Arctic mission, DoD adds that to “function effectively in the Arctic, the Joint Force requires sufficient Arctic-capable equipment to conduct all mission-essential tasks. Military Services and CCMDs responsible for the monitor-and-respond mission should review their relevant Arctic capabilities and requirements to determine if they can achieve their missions, with focus given to interoperability in joint and combined environments.”³⁵ Further to this, DoD “will explore options to expand collaboration with Federal interagency partners and improve information sharing with Arctic Allies and partners. DoD will leverage existing knowledge and skills of the Joint Force to improve “Arctic literacy,” training proficiency, and operational competency in the austere and demanding Arctic environment.”³⁶

Six specific systems and network infrastructure requirements are discussed, starting with “1. All-Domain Awareness and Missile Warning,” which notes, “The Arctic holds our northern approaches to the U.S. homeland, and detecting threats from afar is critical to homeland defense. The network of U.S. and Canadian radars and sensors operated by NORAD and U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) enables the detection and tracking of certain threats from and through portions of the Arctic, but modernization is needed,” and DoD “will work with Canada to enhance our long-range persistent aerospace and maritime surveillance capabilities,” “assess options for improving ground-based sensors to complement and enhance existing NORAD capabilities,” and “continue to research options for new space-based missile-warning and observational systems with greater polar coverage.”³⁷ Such “improvements will strengthen our ability to address current and emerging aerospace and maritime threats from and through the Arctic.”³⁸ DoD will

³³ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 8.

³⁴ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 8.

³⁵ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 8.

³⁶ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 8.

³⁷ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 8-9.

³⁸ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 9.

also “continue to partner with” European partners “to enhance all-domain awareness,” “identify all activities that affect our security interests and ensure our existing network of radars and sensors continue to contribute to Arctic aerospace and missile warning.”³⁹

Next, DoD addresses “2. Communications and Data Architecture,” noting that Arctic communications “have historically posed a particular challenge for the Joint Force due to limited legacy satellite coverage in the region” at high latitudes, and DoD will thus “pursue technology” to redress this “through commercial partners and agreements with NATO Allies and partners” with a “particular focus” on improving satellite coverage, whose “improvements will also enhance DoD’s C5ISR capabilities.”⁴⁰ As DoD explains, “Operating alongside Allies in the Arctic will require robust data transmission capacity” and to “handle the large amount of data, DoD will explore opportunities, in cooperation with Allies and partners, to improve Arctic data coverage and capacity.”⁴¹ This is followed by “3. Arctic Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) Capabilities,” in which DoD embraces “an integrated approach to information sharing and will seek to increase ground-based radar data sharing and expand Space Situational Awareness sharing agreements with select Arctic Allies and space faring nations to promote the responsible use of space.”⁴² Next up is “4. Sensing, Modeling, and Forecasting,” as “[c]limate change is increasing the unpredictability of an already challenging environment, and there are limited sensors and data to aid forecasts and longer-term climate projections” requiring attention, since for “the Joint Force to succeed in the Arctic, it will need to be able to predict and adapt to these conditions” through “advance analysis to better sense, model, and predict the meteorological, atmospheric, and oceanographic environment within the Arctic.”⁴³ And in the spirit of allied cooperation, in this endeavor as well, DoD will pursue “continuing partnerships with other Federal entities for in-situ observations, as well as prioritizing naval oceanography, ice research, coupled atmospheric and ocean modeling, and ionospheric modeling.”⁴⁴

Next up is “5. Infrastructure,” in which DoD notes the importance of its bases for “campaigning, force projection, training, missile defense, satellite downlink, and personnel recovery/search and rescue (PR/SAR),” and that the “Arctic’s vast distances, especially in North America, make supporting infrastructure vital for Arctic operations and presence,” as do the challenges associated with “much of

³⁹ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 9.

⁴⁰ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 9.

⁴¹ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 9.

⁴² 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 9.

⁴³ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 10.

⁴⁴ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 10.

the legacy Cold War-era infrastructure” that “has declined over time due to the harsh environment, lack of investment, and climate change-driven permafrost thawing and coastal erosion.”⁴⁵ Accordingly, “DoD will continue to sustain vital infrastructure in the region and will preserve regular access to and use of key Ally and partner bases” and to “maintain investments in key Alaskan and Arctic infrastructure that enables the Joint Force to rapidly project power across the Arctic” that “will improve our ability to monitor and respond to threats in support of homeland defense and security in the Arctic. Additionally, DoD will implement its bilateral defense cooperation agreements to enable calibrated presence using existing Allied infrastructure.”⁴⁶

And last in section 1’s discussion of the Joint Force’s Arctic capabilities is “6. Cold Weather Equipment and Mobility” that recognizes that “[g]round, air, and naval mobility platforms require specific sustainment operations not only to function in extreme cold weather, but also through other difficulties that now characterize Arctic conditions throughout the year such as flooding, wildfires, thawing permafrost, and the loss of historic ice.”⁴⁷ DoD, in a rare sign of both domain and situational awareness, seems to be aware both of the Arctic’s history of deep cold as well as its future of increased warmth and volatility, and the many challenges that arise from this most salient of Arctic paradoxes. Acknowledging that “[i]n some cases, equipment, including weapon systems, can be outfitted to meet Arctic specifications, and in other cases, specialized equipment is needed,” DoD will seek to “ensure the adequacy of their Arctic equipment” and to “explore options to improve mobility in all seasons and variable conditions across the Arctic’s diverse geography and weather.”⁴⁸

Engaging with Allies and Partners

This brings us to the second of the 3Es, “Engage,” in which DoD recommits to its allies and partners, foreign and domestic, in the defense of the free Arctic: “Allies and partners form a center of gravity as part of integrated deterrence, and they are at the core of DoD’s strategy for the Arctic as well. The region boasts a notable concentration of highly capable Allies and partners with whom the United States already shares a high degree of cooperation and aligned interests, values, and objectives.”⁴⁹ Indeed, DoD observes that “[w]e share North American aerospace warning, aerospace control, and maritime warning responsibilities with Canada via NORAD, the world’s most enduring binational command,” while in “the European

⁴⁵ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 10.

⁴⁶ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 10.

⁴⁷ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 11.

⁴⁸ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 11.

⁴⁹ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 11.

Arctic, the Joint Force works by, with, and through our Allies to deter aggression in the region.” Moreover, “In addition to relationships with Allied and partner militaries, regular engagement and government-to-government consultations with Alaska Native tribes, communities, and corporations are critical to achieving shared objectives. Many of our Allies and partners live every day in the Arctic operational environment and can bring significant capabilities and expertise to bear.”

Though somewhat belated in being buried so deeply here, (under the second of the 3Es, on the eleventh page of the 18-page strategy, in contrast to the prominent placement of non-Arctic state and seemingly fabricated Arctic arch-nemesis, China, which came before Arctic Leviathan Russia) we finally see DoD embrace its Indigenous partners, though as if something of an afterthought inherited from past policies. DoD thus affirms, “In addition to the important work alongside Allies and partners, DoD will remain ready to cooperate in the Arctic with any state or key stakeholder that shares our interests and is willing to work constructively to address shared challenges.”⁵⁰

DoD proceeds to list in sequence its engagement partners in defense of the free Arctic, with some surprises in its prioritization (given its priorities expressed in the above-discussed map of the Arctic’s strategic environment): “1. NATO;” “2. Arctic Fora and Institutions;” “3. Special Operations Forces;” “4. Total Force;” “5. Indigenous and Alaska Native Tribes and Communities;” “6 Federal Interagency Partnerships;” “7. Arctic Literacy;” and “8. Arctic Research.” This positions NATO at the top of its list of engagement partners, in a nod to the alliance’s recent Nordic expansion, counterbalancing its reduced prioritization of NATO in its elaboration of the Arctic strategic environment. And it positions the Arctic’s many collaborative multilateral forums, such as the Arctic Council, second, before its military partners – including SOF as well as reserve forces and national guard components that contribute to DoD’s total force. The latter, in particular, have a long and storied history in Alaska owing to the importance of what started out as the Alaska Territorial Guard (also known as the Alaska Eskimo Scouts) in Alaska’s defense effort in World War II, the only American state to be occupied by Japanese forces (which, however, is not discussed by DoD in its new Arctic strategy, despite its historic importance). Alaska Natives and Arctic Indigenous peoples and their communities rank fifth – coming only before other federal departments involved in DoD’s interagency partnerships – an interesting placement, near but not at the bottom, and above non-DoD federal agencies (which come last – perhaps in a subtle jab at the interagency process.)

⁵⁰ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 11.

I have long argued that Indigenous peoples of the Arctic should come first and foremost in our partnering priorities, given their central and contributing role in the stability of the Arctic states' sovereignty, and where I have argued elsewhere could become a future battlefield for control of the Arctic in the event of interstate war and/or state collapse. This appears to be happening to the portion of the Sami homeland in Russia's western Arctic, as Moscow designates dozens of Sami political organizations as enemies of the state, leading to a new way of fear and exile reminiscent of past purges of non-Russian minorities as Moscow seeks to pre-emptively expand its control over Indigenous homelands near its borders with NATO. I discussed this in the US Coast Guard's *Proceedings* magazine in 2021 – and elaborate upon this in my most recent book, *Arctic Exceptionalism: Cooperation in a Contested World*.

From Circumpolar Cooperation Across Old East-West Divide to Alliance-centered Collaboration within Re-Emergent Blocs

Highlights of DoD's engagement partners follow here, mapping its network of domestic and international actors bound by alliance or constitution to unity of effort, and with which DoD will collaborate in defense of the Arctic. First, on 1. NATO, DoD notes "NATO Allies have a strategic interest and a treaty obligation to defend NATO territory in the Arctic" and that "Finland and Sweden joining the Alliance creates opportunities for further collaboration, increased information sharing, and deepened cooperation, including by strengthening domain awareness, regional planning, and capabilities."⁵¹ Participating in "NATO and Allied Arctic exercises ... will enable the Joint Force to increase warfighting skills in Arctic conditions, use lessons learned from past engagements, and provide opportunities to learn from our Allies' extensive cold weather operating experience. This collaboration, including through unity and clarity of public-facing strategic communications, will be critical to maintaining stability and deterrence."⁵² On "2. Arctic Fora and Institutions," DoD "will engage in the appropriate Arctic institutions that facilitate regional security dialogue including the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable and Arctic Chiefs-of-Defense meetings" in addition to "Arctic Coast Guard Forum and the Arctic Council," the latter which – as a result of the American-led boycott under Russia's term as rotating chair after it invaded Ukraine in 2022 – has faced an uncertain future. DoD nonetheless pledges its support to this diminished institution: "While the mandate for the Arctic Council explicitly excludes defense topics, DoD will collaborate with its Federal

⁵¹ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 11.

⁵² 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 11.

interagency partners to support the United States' efforts to maintain the Arctic Council as the principal multilateral forum for the Arctic."⁵³

Next, DoD in turn discusses "3. Special Operations Forces" and then "4. Total Force" contributing components (reserve and national guard forces) – noting first that "special operations forces (SOF) provide unique expertise, capabilities, and access in the Arctic that strengthen the U.S. ability to campaign in the region" and that they are a "a critical source of innovation for Arctic capabilities," and that "DoD and Arctic Allied SOF collaborate closely, and this collaboration provides a distinct advantage focused on domain awareness, early warning, and forward posture," a cooperation that will continue."⁵⁴ Next, DoD turns to "4. Total Force;" noting that "Much of DoD's Arctic expertise resides in the Reserve Components, including the National Guard, and DoD will continue to rely on the capabilities and expertise provided by the Total Force to achieve success in the Arctic."⁵⁵ DoD describes how the "National Guard hosts cold weather training exercises, contributes to PR/SAR operations in the region, and provides a significant portion of the Joint Force's Arctic airlift capability and air-to-air refueling in Alaska and the Arctic region," while the "National Guard Bureau (NGB) also manages the State Partnership Program (SPP), which is a key security cooperation mechanism for engaging with Arctic Allies in support of the CCMDs, as demonstrated by the Minnesota National Guard's ongoing partnership with Norway."⁵⁶ Though the historic importance of the ATG to the defense of Alaska through partnership with Alaska Native communities, and in particular, the sharpshooting expertise of Native hunters, is not mentioned, DoD's recognition of the importance of the Guard to its Total Force capacity in the Arctic suggests at least the possibility of renewed engagement with the Alaska National Guard through more pro-active and supportive partnerships with Alaska Natives in defense activities.

Section "5. Indigenous and Alaska Native Tribes and Communities" does look directly at DoD's partnership with Alaska Natives in addition to Arctic Indigenous peoples outside the United States, noting they "hold valuable understanding of operating in the region and have thrived in the Arctic for thousands of years," and that, "[c]onsistent with the NSAR, DoD will continue to consult and coordinate with Alaska Native tribes, communities, and Alaska Native corporations. Further, DoD will work to incorporate Indigenous Knowledge about the Arctic to inform and improve our ability to effectively operate in the region and to increase our understanding about potential DoD impacts on subsistence culture and ways of

⁵³ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 12.

⁵⁴ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 12.

⁵⁵ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 12.

⁵⁶ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 12.

life.”⁵⁷ A more nuanced and detailed appreciation of the World War II and Cold War contribution of Alaska Natives to the national defense would, of course, strengthen this component of DoD’s second of the 3Es, Engagement, and demonstrate greater domain awareness and historical knowledge of this most important domestic and transnational partnership that is the very foundation of a stable Arctic.

Lastly, we come to “6. Federal Interagency Partnerships” that builds on past Arctic policy, noting that “[e]nsuring stability and maintaining U.S. national interests in the Arctic is a whole-of-government effort requiring consistent collaboration with interagency counterparts,” something DoD will continue to support, including the “Department of State as we engage with our Allies and partners on Arctic security issues,” while “collaborating with interagency counterparts to identify activities and address gray zone threats from our competitors in the economic, diplomatic, and information spaces.”⁵⁸ DoD will continue to partner with the “Department of Homeland Security (DHS), including through the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), which plays a vital role in maintaining U.S. presence in the Arctic region;” with the “Federal Emergency Management Agency in the event of disaster, terrorist attack, or other mass-casualty incident in the Arctic;” and with the “Department of Commerce’s National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to collect and disseminate critical environmental information, aiming to enhance domain awareness and improve DoD operability.”⁵⁹ To help consolidate its engagement efforts, DoD next discusses “7. Arctic Literacy,” noting that “[s]uccessfully campaigning in the Arctic requires specialized understanding and knowledge of the region’s unique operating environment and strategic importance,” and as such, “DoD will leverage the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies (TSC) to develop security-related educational programs for both international and U.S. participants,” and through which “DoD will promote DoD-wide Arctic security and climate education, training, and information-sharing to ensure our workforce can operate successfully in the Arctic.”⁶⁰ Further, in “8. Arctic Research,” DoD notes that “[a]dvancements in research and development will be fundamental to future Arctic operations to improve Joint Force Arctic capabilities and understanding of the changing environment,” and “[t]o drive alignment on priorities, DoD will continue to periodically host the DoD Polar Research Workshop, collaborate with the Interagency Arctic Research and Policy Committee, and adopt commercial solutions where practical” and to “work with Allies and partners to strengthen the work of the International Cooperative Engagement Program on Polar Research (ICE-PPR), which seeks to accelerate the development of Arctic capabilities while

⁵⁷ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 12.

⁵⁸ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 13.

⁵⁹ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 13-14.

⁶⁰ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 14.

reducing duplication of effort.”⁶¹ And lastly, “DoD’s support of state-of-the-art research at DoD Laboratories will continue to further Arctic operational requirements and foster partnership with academic institutions. DoD values and will continue to support its decades-long partnership with the National Science Foundation to advance Arctic science for domestic and international entities.”⁶²

Exercising Arctic Presence through Increased Training

This brings us to the third and last of the 3E’s: Exercising presence in the Arctic. As DoD describes, “Continuing to exercise presence in the Arctic through training and operations will enhance deterrence by demonstrating combat-credible capabilities and the ability to respond rapidly to threats in the Arctic and elsewhere around the globe.”⁶³ Further, DoD adds, “Training, exercising, and operating across all domains in the Arctic, with supporting infrastructure, will improve operational effectiveness by familiarizing the Joint Force with the unique and demanding operating environments of the North American and European Arctic regions. By exercising alongside Arctic Allies and partners, the Joint Force will improve interoperability and gain regional expertise.”⁶⁴ This includes “1. Service-specific, Joint, Interagency, and Combined Exercises” to “increase interoperability with Allies and partners, validate plans, train our ability to rapidly deploy to all parts of the Arctic region, and provide an opportunity to test equipment in Arctic conditions.”⁶⁵ This will entail the following:

“In the North American Arctic region, DoD will leverage ARCTIC EDGE, DoD’s premier Arctic exercise, and U.S. Indo-Pacific Command’s (USINDOPACOM) NORTHERN EDGE to develop and strengthen homeland defense plans, exercise joint presence, and highlight global integration among USNORTHCOM, USEUCOM, and USINDOPACOM. DoD will also enhance readiness through the U.S. Navy’s biennial Operation ICE CAMP submarine exercise north of Alaska, and the U.S. Army’s annual Alaska rotation of the Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center. To hone Arctic early warning and missile defense capabilities, DoD will train with Canada through Operation NANOOK and through NORAD and USNORTHCOM-led operations and exercises NOBLE DEFENDER and VIGILANT SHIELD. In the European Arctic, the Joint Force will participate in USEUCOM, NATO, and Ally-hosted exercises such as NORDIC RESPONSE,

⁶¹ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 14.

⁶² 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 14.

⁶³ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 14.

⁶⁴ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 15.

⁶⁵ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 15.

DYNAMIC MONGOOSE, and ARCTIC CHALLENGE to ensure the Joint Force is familiar with the different operating conditions in the European Arctic.”⁶⁶

In addition to the above-discussed exercises, DoD observes that it will “conduct war games, simulations, and tabletop exercises focusing on the Arctic that challenge prevailing assumptions and explore potential gaps,” as “[t]he experiential learning from these exercises serves as important Arctic and climate literacy opportunities, further strengthening DoD’s strategic planning and engagement with partners.”⁶⁷

Arctic Operations and Training

In “2. Arctic Operations,” DoD notes that it, “along with our Allies, will continue to conduct routine operations in the region” for purposes that include “supporting NORAD’s enforcement of the U.S. and Canadian air defense identification zones consistent with international law and custom; providing integrated air and missile defense; identifying and intercepting vessels within waters under U.S. jurisdiction that are acting inconsistent with navigation rights reflected in UNCLOS; routinely deploying submarines to the region to provide undersea awareness and bolster integrated deterrence in defense of U.S. and Allied interests; dynamically deploying ground forces to the Arctic to demonstrate deterrent capabilities; continuing airborne and maritime patrols with Allies across the Arctic region to include areas such as the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom gap; supporting NATO’s Air Policing mission in Iceland; and providing airlift and refueling capability to U.S. and appropriate Ally and partner aircraft in the Arctic region.”⁶⁸

In “3. Training,” DoD elaborates upon its need for “requisite skills, training, and experience. Each Service should regularly train Arctic capable forces individually and collectively in cold weather operational skills (e.g., skiing, snowshoeing, unit movement, medical care, equipment sustainment, and survival) required for successful Joint and combined operations in an Arctic environment,” and in “4. Defending the Stable and Open International System,” as “[p]reserving navigational rights and freedoms in increasingly accessible Arctic waterways is key to maintaining a stable and secure region,” DoD commits to “continue to monitor potential threats to freedom of navigation in the Arctic, uphold lawful uses of the seas guaranteed to all States under customary international law as reflected in UNCLOS, and protect the global mobility of U.S., Allied, and partner forces by

⁶⁶ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 15.

⁶⁷ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 16.

⁶⁸ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 16.

conducting Arctic maritime exercises, operations, and transits, in coordination with these nations, as appropriate.”⁶⁹

From Ways to Means: DOD’S PATH Forward – Fostering a Stable Arctic, or Destabilizing an Already-Peaceful Region?

From Ways to Means: A Path Forward

On its penultimate page, DoD’s 2024 Arctic strategy closes with a discussion of its “Means” of achieving the “Ways” discussed above, noting that its strategy “provides a path forward for DoD, working with U.S. Government counterparts, and with Allies and partners, to both manage risks and embrace opportunities presented by a changing Arctic region,” and embracing a “pragmatic and transparent approach is intended to reduce the possibility of escalation or misinterpretation.”⁷⁰ Without acknowledging that its over-emphasis of a non-existent threat from the non-Arctic state China is in and of itself an escalatory act, the strategy does, despite its fear-mongering and inherent China-bashing, outline a path toward closer military cooperation with U.S. allies as well as its domestic partners, furthering the recalibration of America’s commitment to Arctic cooperation through the lens of alliance solidarity as the Arctic continues to bifurcate into two dueling blocs, one democratic and one autocratic, in a replay of the Cold War.

Instead of questioning some of these ideologically partisan and seemingly myopic (if not outright delusional) perceptions of the Arctic’s strategic environment in an effort to triangulate through the fog of perception to the clarity of ground (or ice) truth to help set America on a sound strategic path in the polar region, the strategy instead considers other risks including that of competing demands from other regions and conflicts to which the Joint Force is committed, such as – of particularly salience after a year of intensifying and horizontally escalating war and conflict – in the Middle East.

As DoD notes, “A primary risk to the successful implementation of this strategy stems from the need to balance against other global priorities. DoD and the Joint Force have global responsibilities and must remain prepared to respond to a broad range of challenges and threats around the world.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 16.

⁷⁰ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 17.

⁷¹ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 17.

Additionally, funding, equipment and infrastructure development and sustainment are also noted as a risk to the strategy's successful implementation:

"Insufficient investments in early warning and air defense sensors in the Arctic will increase risks to the U.S. homeland. A lack of Arctic-capable domain awareness and communications capabilities would hamper the U.S. military's ability to operate in the region in response to competitor activities. Lastly, insufficient Arctic readiness will cast doubt on the credibility of the Joint Force to effectively operate in the region. To ensure the Arctic does not become a strategic blind spot, this strategy outlines a series of deliberate steps for DoD to improve its ability to monitor events in the Arctic and, when directed, execute a tailored response to national security threats alongside its interagency and international partners."⁷²

With the Arctic falling within the jurisdictions of several combatant commands including EUCOM, INDOPACOM and NORTHCOM, DoD maintains its support of NORTHCOM "as DoD's Arctic capability advocate" to "coordinate with other CCMDs to identify and request resources for Arctic capability gaps, as appropriate, through DoD's established planning and programming processes as directed in the Unified Command Plan. The Under Secretary of Defense for Policy will develop Department-wide policy that builds enduring advantages in Arctic."⁷³

Toward a Brave, New Arctic? Avoiding a Return to Cold War Thinking in Our Post-Cold War World

We come, at last, to the conclusion of DoD's 2024 Arctic Strategy, which, after 18 pages, closes with refreshing succinctness, as if the authors of the strategy had run out of words and ideas – not the first time – finding only 72 words to bring the strategy to its close: "As the Arctic security environment evolves, DoD must remain prepared to protect our national interests. The calibrated approach laid out in this strategy will guide how DoD adapts to geopolitical and geophysical changes in the Arctic and ensure U.S. Allies and partners act cohesively in this increasingly accessible region. With the appropriate resources, this strategy will enable DoD to support whole-of-government efforts to maintain security and stability in the Arctic and beyond."⁷⁴ This statement reinforces America's long embrace of Arctic collaboration in its approach to securing the Arctic.

⁷² 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 17.

⁷³ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 17.

⁷⁴ 2024 DoD Arctic Strategy, 18.

While Russia was once considered a partner in American Arctic policy and strategy, since 2016 – and particularly after Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine – this would no longer be the case, with Russia even considered for a time the top Arctic security threat facing the expanded and increasingly unified NATO. But now, Russia as the principal Arctic menace to the West has itself been displaced by non-Arctic China, the illogic of which has been described above. While projecting onto a largely peaceful Arctic a largely imagined threat from the non-Arctic state China, and under-emphasizing the potentially extinction-level risk of climate change which confronts us all, the strategy succeeds in DoD’s and the U.S. Government’s continued effort to recalibrate Arctic cooperation for an increasingly divided world, one where alliances and strategic alignments of interest within emergent bloc fault lines are increasingly important lenses through which to conceptualize the limits of cooperation in an increasingly contested and divided Arctic.

America seems once again to be in quest of a worthy adversary to justify its strategic attention, and in the absence of such to manufacture one as it has done on so many occasions in the past, such as the overhyped (and far more divided than portrayed) “Red Menace” of the early Cold War, or the non-existent “Missile Gap” that followed, unnecessarily fueling the nuclear arms race. When America went to war against Iraq in 2003, it fabricated evidence of complicity in the 9/11 attacks and conjured up an illusory WMD program that had already been dismantled in the aftermath of the previous (1991) Iraq War. For the so-called “shining light upon the hill” of global democracy, it continues to surprise this author how often America has, time and again, built its national security policy upon a foundation of lies to feed its war machine, and the military-industrial-policy-academic complex that justifies its insatiable, Borg-like appetite for budgetary resources, regardless of truth.

America’s current elevation of non-Arctic China as a primary threat to the Arctic order continues a policy of overstating a largely non-existent Chinese threat to Arctic security that dates back to the 2018 release of Beijing’s first Arctic strategy, which arrived in the form of its attention-grabbing white paper that quickly became an obsession at the Pentagon and throughout its vast ecosystem of dependencies including multiple DoD-funded research institutes and service academies that collectively developed a sudden interest in (and bias against) China’s Arctic ambitions. Case in point: consider recent public (and unnecessarily inflammatory) comments made by a top Wilson Center Polar Institute official (and former Naval War College faculty member), who described DoD’s new Arctic strategy’s elevated concerns with China in the Arctic to *NPR*’s Jackie Northam in August: “I think we see the PRC attempting to undermine regional governance and to increasingly advance this narrative that non-Arctic states should have influence in the region. So I think that is something where we do see the PRC influencing the governance

conversation in a way that is contrary to U.S. interests,” and they further allege: “China sends its research ice breakers to the Arctic every year ostensibly to collect climate data. But, of course, they’re also collecting, you know, intelligence data and mapping submarine cables and all that kind of thing because, you know, everything they do is dual use.”⁷⁵

But China’s contribution to climate change research in the Arctic has been robust and enduring now for many years, and its polar presence as an Arctic research polity can be dated back almost a century to its 1925 accession as a signatory to the 1920 Spitzbergen Treaty, which internationalized scientific and economic access to Svalbard.⁷⁶ China’s renewed Arctic scientific engagement is laudable and contributes greatly to our understanding of Arctic climate yet is dismissed cavalierly and with much seeming prejudice and imperial hubris by members of the U.S. national security community. What is being overlooked in the “dual-use” argument against Beijing is that nearly all Arctic-bound ice breaker transits, Chinese or otherwise, can be logically described as dual-use – as most research conducted thereupon is funded by researchers’ respective governments with national security, strategic and diplomatic objectives always in mind – such as providing scientific evidence to support extended continental shelf (ECS) claims under UNCLOS) or measuring ice thickness, of interest to all northbound submarine and icebreaker traffic. Chinese scholars and diplomats should, of course, strenuously object to such official mischaracterizations and overgeneralizations of China’s Arctic research. In 2020, this same military scholar had earlier observed: “US strategy has not yet fully engaged the ramifications of growing Sino-Russian cooperation across economic, military, and political dimensions in the Arctic region. Without a linked strategic approach, the U.S. runs the risk of strategic misstep.”⁷⁷

The new DoD Arctic strategy redresses any prior absence of this linkage, but it is precisely this very interlinking of Russia and China in the Arctic into a new, menacing (and as I explain here, much overhyped) axis that is causing America to make just such a strategic misstep now – with potentially profound and dangerous

⁷⁵ Jackie Northam, “Pentagon Sounds Alarm Over Russia-China Cooperation in the Arctic.”

⁷⁶ Nengye Liu, “China and One Hundred Years of Svalbard Treaty: Past, Present and Future,” *Journal of Marine Policy*, Volume 124 (February 2021), <https://doi.org/10.16/j.marpol.2020.104354>.

⁷⁷ Rebecca Pincus, “Three- Way Power Dynamics in the Arctic,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Spring 2020, 40-63, https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/SSQ/documents/Volume-14_Issue-1/Pincus.pdf. Another official at Wilson Center Polar Institute official took a more balanced view of Sino-Russian cooperation in the Arctic, noting that the 2022 Arctic Council] pause “presents non-Arctic states with an opportunity to work more closely with the Arctic states,” and while this was “true for the A-7 states ... in parallel we can expect that Russia will reach out to China and India, to involve them even further in Arctic affairs.” Evan T. Bloom, “After a 6-month Arctic Council pause, it’s time to seek new paths forward,” *Arctic Today*, September 6, 2022, <https://www.arctictoday.com/after-a-6-month-arctic-council-pause-its-time-to-seek-new-paths-forward/>.

consequences. It is not, and has not been, a strategic mistake to view Russia and China separately in the Arctic, given the historic, inherent and most fundamental differences in their respective governance systems, scale and relative global integration of their economies, and compatibilities of their governing ideologies: Russia is in fact the pre-eminent Arctic super-state, a geopolitical bridge anchored in both the West and the East upon which the stability of much of Eurasia depends; while China is the geopolitical center of mass for much of East Asia and a geopolitical bridge linking Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania – and a non-Arctic state, full stop.

While DoD's new Arctic strategy reiterates America's continued commitment to cooperation with its Arctic allies, it now in essence divides the Arctic into two emergent and contending blocs. It is this bifurcation of the long-united Arctic that poses the greatest danger to global peace and security. As Arctic geopolitical expert Lassi Heininen has recently argued in "Rethinking Arctic Peace and Stability: Moving from Speculation to Reaffirming Commitments" in the *Arctic Circle Journal*, "Ultimately, while seven [NATO-aligned] Arctic states may share the thinking that Russia is no longer a reliable partner, they nevertheless still share with Russia the undeniable knowledge that the benefits of cooperation and stability are much greater than those of conflict and confrontation" – and as a result, he adds, the Arctic "is still free of armed conflicts, warfare and uprisings, unlike many other parts of the world."⁷⁸ This preserves the cooperative foundation that has shaped Arctic diplomacy for so long, and keeps the prevention of a new Arctic Cold War in the realm of the possible. Heininen posits that it is now "logical and sensible, at this stage, to recognize the shared interests and special features as constructive aspects and ingredients of Arctic geopolitics and governance," and thus time to "rethink, discuss and debate how to reaffirm commitments to maintain peace and stability."⁷⁹

Doing so now is no less a necessity than it was at the outset of the Ukraine war, when an Arctic Council boycott was announced in a manner that betrayed the Council's core inclusive principles of multilevel collaboration and consultation as articulated in the 1996 Ottawa Declaration (which had itself continued the collaborative spirit of the preceding 1991 AEPS). The post-invasion *de facto* expulsion of Russia from the circumpolar family put at risk the hitherto enduring vision of Arctic collaboration that for so long has brought unity to the Arctic's diverse community of states (Arctic, and increasingly, non-Arctic as well), tribal peoples, and international organizations, and China's present marginalization as

⁷⁸ Lassi Heininen, "Rethinking Arctic Peace and Stability: Moving from Speculation to Reaffirming Commitments," *Arctic Circle Journal*, August 29, 2024, <https://www.arcticcircle.org/journal/rethinking-arctic-peace-and-stability-moving-from-speculation-to-reaffirming-commitments>.

⁷⁹ Lassi Heininen, "Rethinking Arctic Peace and Stability: Moving from Speculation to Reaffirming Commitments."

articulated in DoD's new Arctic strategy brings the self-same risk – and requires us to engage in a “rethink” as Heininen describes, before it's too late. In contrast to the pessimists who have ruminated on the eventual (and, some believe, inevitable) demise of the Arctic Council and its inclusive spirit of universal, circumpolar cooperation, I agree with Heininen and believe that Arctic cooperation is neither doomed nor on death's door, and that it remains essential to a stable world. As Arctic environment and climate expert Ed Struzik has eloquently put it, “The Arctic has long been a model for optimism and international cooperation. A lot needs to be done to keep it that way.”⁸⁰

This approach requires a bolder and more visionary effort to return to collaborative and unifying principles that inspired the formation of both the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy in 1991 and the Arctic Council in 1996, reuniting all stakeholders that sat together around the inclusive, and iconic, Council table – Russia included, as well as the healthy diversity of the growing ecosystem of observer states (inclusive of China) from around the world that each bring to the Arctic something new and special (reminiscent in its unity of King Arthur's legendary Round Table, around which his heroic knights famously collaborated).

Then, we can restore the Arctic's important, inclusive and collaborative work of saving the Arctic (and humanity) from the real and truly menacing dangers of climate change, environmental risk, and the many other pressures of our modernizing world which, while not entirely ignored in the latest iteration of DoD's Arctic strategy, have become increasingly and regrettably de-prioritized in favor of a more zero-sum, Westphalian hard power approach to securing the Arctic from increasingly overstated, indeed illusory, threats – as a unified West, more tightly bound together within the expanded NATO alliance, pivots away from these real, complex global challenges toward newly perceived, ideologically reinforced, oversimplified, and at times outright manufactured threats to the Arctic that are, simply put, more imagined than real. Such illusory threats to the Arctic are instead rooted in the fog of misperception, and an increasingly systemic bias resulting from ideological selection than a more objective assessment of the Arctic's true strategic environment would produce – putting the Arctic, and the wider world to its south, at even greater risk of a strategic misstep, and with that, the dangerous specter of grave miscalculation.

⁸⁰ Ed Struzik, quoted in Barry Scott Zellen, “The Arctic Aflame: Intensifying Arctic Wildfires Present a Sobering Reminder that Climate Change Remains a Grave and Gathering Threat to the Arctic,” *The Arctic Institute*, February 20, 2024, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/arctic-aflame-intensifying-arctic-wildfires-present-sobering-reminder-climate-change-remains-grave-gathering-threat-arctic/>.